

Health Consultation

What is a Health Consultation

A Health Consultation is an evaluation of sampling data collected at a hazardous waste and sometimes, industrial sites. The data are evaluated to determine whether exposure to chemicals found at a site might cause harmful health effects. The Health Advisor who prepares the Consultation looks at past, present and future exposures. Once the evaluation is completed, the Health Consultation will have specific recommendations on how to protect public health.

There are three sources of information used to evaluate a site:

- ❖ **Environmental data:** Information on chemicals found at the site. The Department of Health does not collect environmental data directly—most data come from other agencies.
- ❖ **Health data:** Information on exposure effects (toxicology) and community-wide rates of disease—compared with national and state rates.
- ❖ **Community health concerns:** Information from community members about how the site affects their health or quality of life.

After analyzing all environmental and health site data, a Consultation should answer these questions:

1. Where is the site located?
2. Who has used the site?
3. What activities have taken place at the site?
4. What are the levels of chemicals found?
5. How might people come into contact with the chemicals (exposure pathways)?

6. How might the chemicals affect people's health?
7. Would living or working near the site affect health?
8. What can be done to protect people's health?

Who Conducts Health Consultations

The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (a federal public health agency) and the Washington State Department of Health have entered into a cooperative agreement to form a team of specialists that conduct Health Consultations in Washington State. This team works through the Department of Health to study possible public health problems caused by harmful chemicals released into the environment at sites throughout Washington State.

Other Health Consultation Activities

Depending on the conclusions of the Consultation, other activities may be performed:

Community Involvement: This work involves the community through: public meetings, health-fairs, public awareness notices, etc.

Education: This can be for the public or for health care providers. For example, education may include special training sessions at hospitals for doctors and nurses or development and distribution of fact sheets to affected community members. Specific educational activities for each site are planned, based on public health concerns and potential health effects.

Health Studies: Specific studies of people living near or working at the site being evaluated. Health studies often make use of past health records, medical tests, and surveys.

Research: Sometimes we do not know enough about the health effects of a hazardous chemical. A Consultation may recommend that additional studies or chemical specific research be done.

Cleanup: All staff work closely with environmental agencies—recommending cleanup actions, reviewing cleanup plans and communicating risks and protective measures to impacted residents.

Involvement in a Health Consultation

We want to hear from people who live near or work at a site we are evaluating. Input from the local community helps identify:

- ◆ How the site may have affected people's health.

- ◆ What health effects people in the community are concerned about.
- ◆ What the community thinks about the clean up process.

How is the Health Consultation Used

The Health Consultation conclusions identify whether there is a public health hazard associated with site-related chemical exposures. Based on our conclusions, we make recommendations that advise federal, state, and local agencies on actions to prevent or reduce people's exposure to any hazardous chemicals released at those sites. Protective measures are also presented in the Consultation for affected community members to take action to protect their own health.

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